



St. Maurice and the Theban Legion

The Roman legion of Christians, called the Theban Legion, under the presidency of their General, Maurice, numbered more than six thousand men. They marched from the East into Gaul, which was in revolt. They were camped near the Lake of Geneva, when they received orders to join with the others in a solemn sacrifice to the gods. They retired a little farther away, to a site today called Saint Maurice d'Augaune, in order to abstain, but were told to return and join in the festival with the others. They found themselves in the sad necessity of disobeying the command. It was not an act of felony for these brave soldiers, who had already fought many battles, but of heroic loyalty. Nonetheless, the barbaric prince gave the order to decimate the Legion. It would seem the emperor's messengers might have feared a forced resistance, but the disciples of Jesus Christ hoped for nothing but a peaceful victory over the world and the demon, with all his false gods.

The names of the soldiers were written on papers and placed in the caps of the centurions, for 600 were destined to perish as examples. These embraced their comrades, who encouraged them and even envied their fate. The plain soon flowed with the blood of the martyrs. The survivors persisted in declaring themselves Christians, and the butchery began again; the blood of another 600 reddened the waters of the Rhone. The others all persevered in their faith, and Saint Maurice sent to the tyrant an admirable letter, saying: Emperor, we are your soldiers; we are ready to combat the enemies of the empire, but we are also Christians, and we owe fidelity to the true God. We are not rebels, but we prefer to die, innocent, rather than to live, guilty. The Emperor, seeing himself defeated, ordered them all to be massacred. As the massacre began, these generous soldiers deposed their weapons, offered their necks to the sword, and suffered themselves to be butchered in silence.